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December 16, 2009

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"Providing our troops with the equipment and resources they need is the most important action we can take as Americans to support the men and women who defend our country," said Rep. Melancon. "Louisianians can be proud that projects included in this bill will enable our civilian workers and businesses to play a role in our nation's defense."

"With this bill, the rights of assault victims to their day in court are more firmly protected. No longer will workers have to sign away their right to justice in order to get a job. And no longer will taxpayer dollars go to companies that would rather sweep an assault charge under the rug than protect their employees. We must safeguard the rights and values we hold as Americans, and protect the fundamental promise of justice for all our citizens."

Protecting Victims of Assault

Since October, Rep. Melancon has been working to include in the final Defense funding bill an amendment banning federal contracts to companies that restrict their employees' access to courts of law. The Franken Amendment (S.AMDT 2588), which passed the Senate on a

bi-partisan vote of 68-30, bars funds for contractors who use mandatory arbitration clauses in their employment contracts, clauses that can deny assault victims their day in court.

The amendment was prompted by a recent case in which a young woman who said she was raped while working for a defense contractor in Iraq learned that a clause in her contract barred her from taking her case against her employer to court. Instead, her contract forced her into an arbitration process run by her company.

In an [October speech](#) supporting the amendment, Rep. Melancon said, **"No American citizen should ever have to sign away his or her right to justice in order to get a job. And not a dime of taxpayer money should go to companies that would rather sweep an assault under the rug than allow our justice system to work.... If we fail to enact this measure, we will have failed to protect the rights and values we were sworn to uphold when we took our oath of office. We can not let that happen."**

Congressman Melancon also sent a letter to House leadership urging them to include the Franken Amendment in the final Defense Appropriations bill.

Funding for Troops

In addition to protecting the rights of victims, the Defense bill (H.R. 3326) will support ongoing operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the general military effort against terrorism for fiscal year 2010.

The measure also provides additional funds for equipment depleted by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including new combat vehicles, new battle gear for the Army National Guard and reserves, military pay raises, Special Operations forces, and quality of life improvements for the troops and their families.

Investments in South Louisiana

— Congressman Melancon secured \$4.5 million in investments for defense projects in south Louisiana. He secured \$2 million for the Navy to replace older watercraft with modern Force Protection Boats manufactured by Metal Shark Aluminum Boats, a family-owned small business based in Jeanerette, Louisiana.

Congressman Melancon also secured \$2.5 million for 3D simulation and modeling technology for NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans and other defense facilities. The Integrated Manufacturing Systems 3D Simulation and Modeling Project will be used by NASA and the Department of Defense to retool in a cost effective manner.

Extensions for Unemployment & Health Benefits

Finally, the Defense bill includes several extensions of safety net programs and other priorities that would otherwise expire at the end of the year. The bill extends until the end of February 2010:

- emergency unemployment insurance benefits
- premium subsidies for COBRA health insurance,
- authorization for highway, transit and safety programs, and
- three expiring anti-terrorism authorities included in the Patriot Act and the 2004 intelligence overhaul.

The bill also delays for two months, through Feb. 28, 2010, a scheduled 21.2% reduction in the Medicare payments to physicians, ensuring that doctors who accept seniors on Medicare will not face a pay cut in January. In November, the House passed legislation to permanently reform the broken Medicare physician payment system and protect seniors' access to their doctors. The Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act would permanently repeal the scheduled fee reduction and replace the current physician payment formula with a more stable system.

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